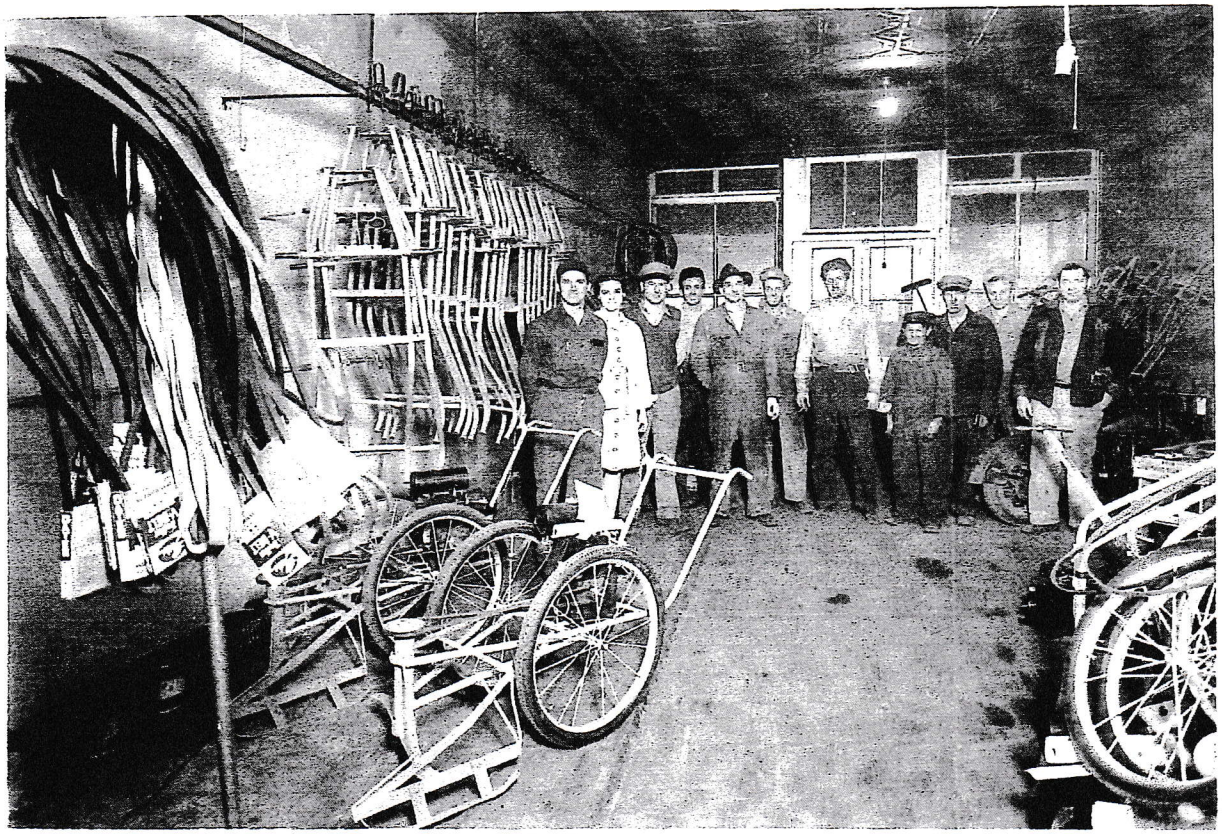
BACHTOLD BROS., INC. HISTORY

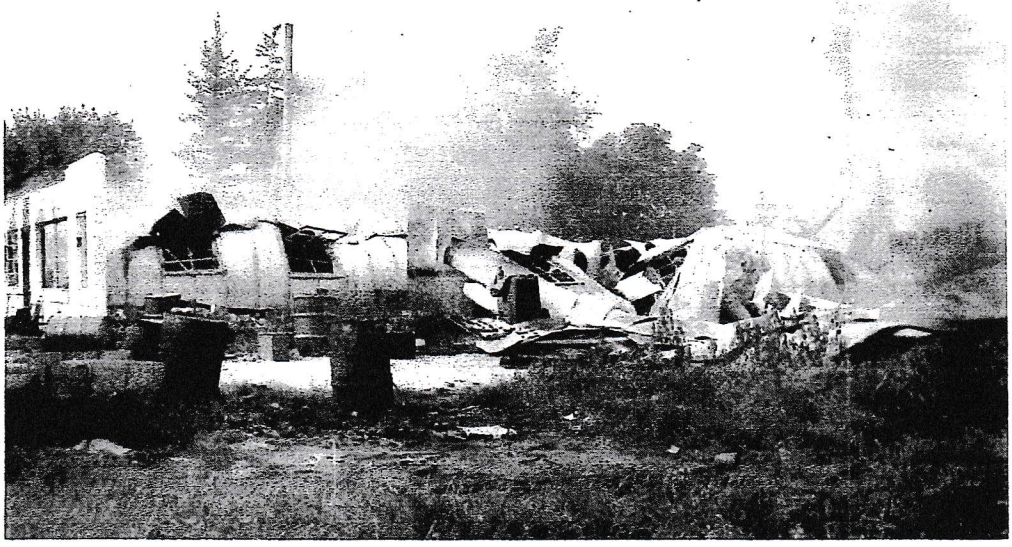
Compiled by Richard Steffen
Edited by Beverly Bachtold

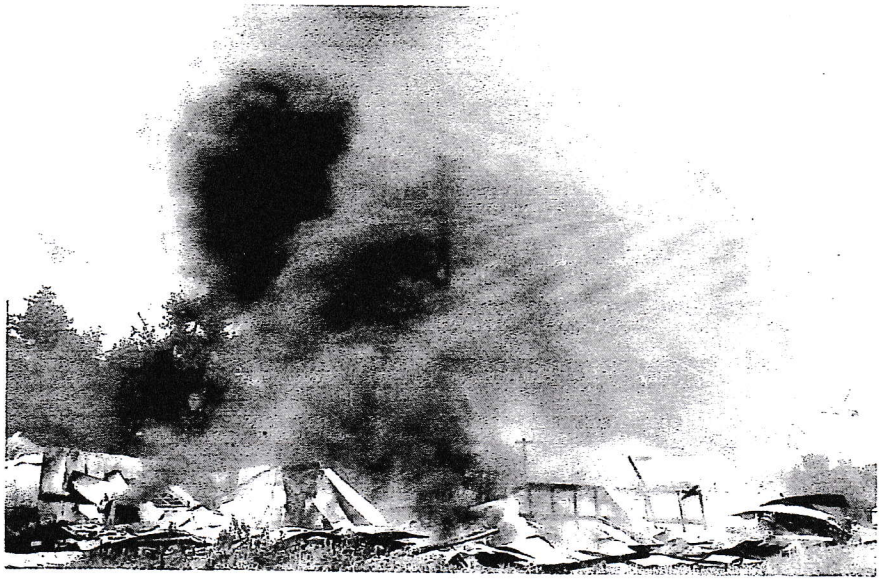
In 1945, Carl Bachtold was farming northwest of Forrest and had asked Earl Roof if he could build some mower parts for him in his farm shop over the winter. Mr. Roof declined the request, so that winter, Carl built his own weedmower and made several of them for his neighbors. It proved to be a great labor saver over the scythe.

In 1946, Carl asked his brother, Alf, to leave Caterpillar in Peoria where he was a tool and die maker and join him in producing weedmowers to sell in volume. That year, they opened a shop on Main Street in Forrest and built approximately 40-50 machines and sold them all.



L to R: Carl Bachtold, Janita Bachtold Koehl, Alf Bachtold, Ray Bowing, Lou Bachtold, Jim Bowing, Ed Nagel, Shorty Taylor, John Nagel, Billy Hornsby, Oakman Tammen. Absent: Bud Reavis and Melvin Bachtold





Elmer bought Alf's half interest out on Thursday, February 20, 1969, and asked Jerry to be the shop manager and Richard Steffen to manage the office for him. Delores Moore had been the secretary at Bachtold Bros. for eight years and always took Friday afternoons off to do housecleaning, etc. Richard worked with her that Friday morning in the office and on Saturday, February 22, she and her husband, Gene, along with another couple went to a ballgame in Champaign. On the way home, they were involved in a head-on collision at the Garber corner on Route 47 near Sibley, and Delores was killed instantly. Elmer was devastated to say the least! His daughter-in-law, Beverly Bachtold, came in to help out in the office during this time and eventually, Elmer's daughter, Linda, was hired as full-time secretary. In the fall of 1969 when the pricing was set up for the 1969-70 season, Elmer dropped the prices to be more competitive with other manufacturers in the market. That year, Bachtold Bros. sold a record 3,450 machines. The previous average from 1956 to that time was between 2,000-2,500 units. During 1971-1973, the volume produced was back down in the low 2,000 range.

On November 3, 1973, C. W. Hicks personally bought Bachtold Bros., Inc. from Elmer with a working contract for Elmer to be on a salary for the next five years until he retired. Mr. Hicks informed Richard that he never wanted to run out of inventory, but the 1970s through the 1980s were very "lean" years, some years as low as 1,200-1,500 machines. Then in 1989 when we had the "drought of the century," they sold less than 1,000 machines! That fall, Country Home Products wanted to test a Whipper mower for approval to use in the direct mail order business, and in April of 1989, Bachtold Bros. built them their first units (25 machines) to get started. By the end of the year, Bachtold Bros. had sold 1,000 machines besides what they sold in mowers through their own distribution which seemed to grow each year back to the 1,800-2,200 unit range. Country Home Products went wild! In 1990, they sold 1,800 units; 1991 - 3,400 units; 1992 - 4,300 units; 1993 - 5,400 units; 1994 - 6,200 units,; 1995 - 7,000 units; 1996 - 7,600 units; 1997 - 8,800 units; 1998 - 9,600 units!

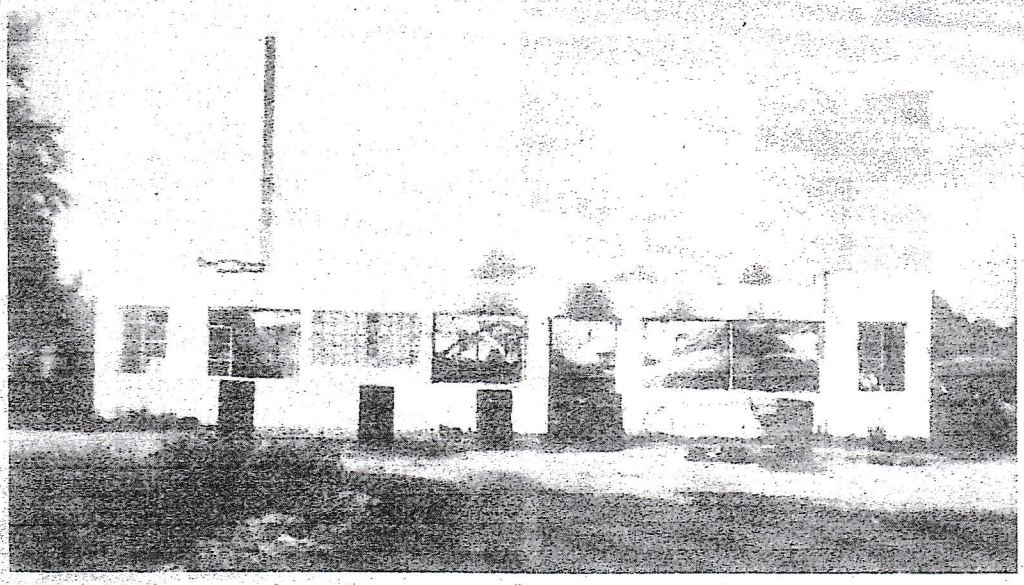
Sadly, in 1989, C. W. Hicks was killed in a car accident on the first curve west of Gibson City on Route 9 on his way to Bloomington. He was 82 years old and never got to share in the great success that Bachtold Bros. experienced those last few years. His grandson, Sean Coady, became the new owner.

On September 17, 1993, Bachtold Bros., Inc. bought the Baillie Manufacturing facility in Gibson City.

On Saturday, February 19, 1994, Bachtold Bros. officially moved the plant to Gibson City and was in full operation on Monday, February 21, at 8:00 a.m.

On October 1, 1999, Bachtold Bros., Inc. bought out Roof Manufacturing in Riverside, California.

On April 16, 2004, Sean Coady, announced closure plans for Bachtold Bros., Inc. On April 29, he laid off or fired all but 6-8 people. On June 30, Bachtold Bros. quit producing all mowers! On Saturday, July 17, 2004, Richard Steffen resigned from Bachtold Bros., Inc., riding it out to



WONDER HOW MANY OF you recall the fire 25 years ago on July 30, 1951 that completely destroyed the Bachtold factory. All that remained was the front of the building. A new building was soon erected on the site. It is located on route 47 at the north edge of Forrest.

Bachtold Brother Buys Firm

FORREST (PNS) — Elmer Bachtold has purchased the shares in Bachtold Brothers Inc., from his brother, Alfred, who has retired.

The retired Mr. Bachtold will devote his spare time to a hobby shop which he will operate in his home.

The Bachtold company has been in business in Forrest for the past 22 years and manufactures weed mowers and attachments. The factory is located in the north section of Forrest. A new line this year is the Tuff Bee riding lawn mower, now being manufactured.

Miss Linda Bachtold of Bloomington will work in the plant as her father's secretary. That post was held by Mrs. Dolores Moore for eight years until her death Feb. 22 in an automobile accident near Gibson City.

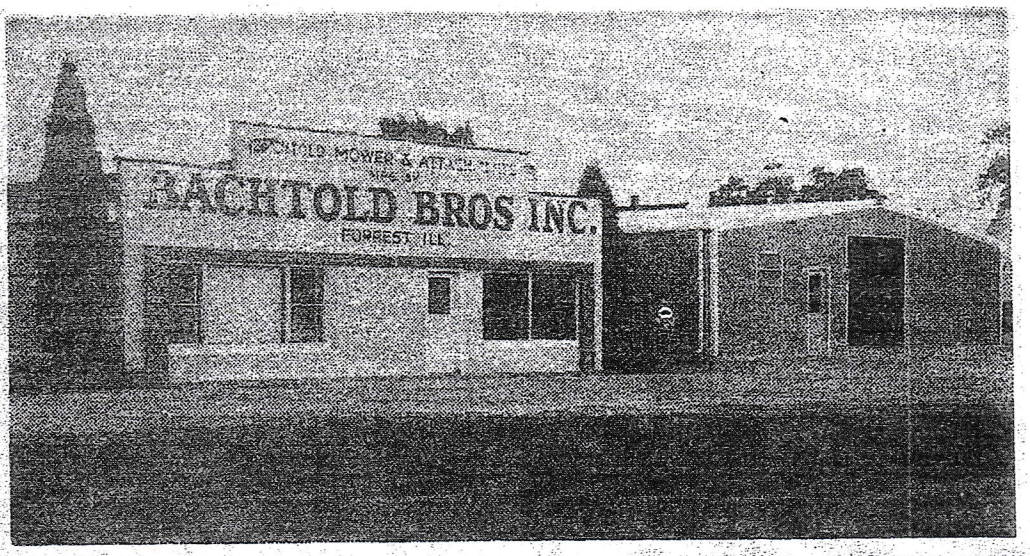
Photo by Judy Knauer

BACHTOLD BROTHERS, Inc., which has been manufacturing field and brush mowers and log splitters for nearly 40 years at 619 N. Center St., Forrest, plans to move to Gibson City around the first of the year.

Supervisor of operations for Bachtold Brothers Inc., Sean Coady, said the company has purchased the Baillie Manufacturing Company building in Gibson. That company ceased operations this past spring. Coady said Bachtold's purchased the plant and planned he move based on the sizes between the two buildings. "Our current plant as 23,000 square feet, while Baillie's has 50,000 square feet," Coady said.

A family-owned business for 50 years, Bachtold Brothers employs about 30 people.

The move is expected to be done in stages and take between three to six months. The fate of the Forrest plant is not yet known.



Forrest — New building, right, beside old one, left, will be used by Bachtold Brothers Inc. as warehouse, paint room and shipping office for completed mowers and attachments made here for 19 years.—(Pantagraph Photo)

Mower Plant Expands Into Second Building

By FERN JOST
Pantagraph Reporter in Forrest

FORREST (PNS) — Bachtold Brothers Inc., which makes mowers and attachments, is expanding at the north edge of Forrest.

Construction is nearly completed on a 50-by 10-by 122-foot building that will be a warehouse, paint room, shipping office and storage building for completed mowers.

The blue-green steel building was erected by Shoop Building Service, Pontiac, on a foundation poured by Forrest Grain.

Site Cleared

One of the other two buildings on the site of the new steel building was torn down and the other was relocated to the east and placed on a new foundation.

This business concern has an interesting history.

It began as a "family affair" and over the years, six brothers have been connected with its operation. Three still are.

Alfred Bachtold is president and Elmer Bachtold is vice president. They are in the Forrest plant. Joseph Bachtold and son, Kenneth, make drive units at their Sibley shop.

Carl Bachtold was a partner at one time and Willis and Melvin Bachtold were employed there. These three brothers have moved from Forrest.

A shop was opened in 1946 on Main St. and the business moved to the present location in 1948. Fire destroyed the plant in 1950 but in four days the brothers were set up again to operate because practically every able-bodied man in Forrest turned out to help by the time the smoke died away.

Buys Motors

The Forrest plant makes the basic units and attachments. The engines are purchased from Wisconsin factories.

Six attachments made here include a fence row weed mower and garden cultivator; a 26, a 30-1, and a 50-inch lawn mowing attachment and a speed reducer to drive grain elevators, augers, etc.

The factory operates through distributors.

The mowers are sold in Australia, South America and some European countries as well as in the United States. The states where demand for the mowers is greatest are Illinois, Iowa and Indiana.

In rush season, the plant can complete 25 mowers a day with 10 employes. Average production is 2,000 machines a year. About two tons of parts are shipped parcel post from the local post office each year.

One employe, Leon Reavis, Fairbury, has been with the plant from the beginning. Mrs. Eugene Moore is secretary.

JOHN DEERE